

SELF-STUDY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF INFORMAL EDUCATION

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Summary

Foreign languages play a special role in the process of forming intercultural communicative and professional competence. Currently, the main goal of a foreign language course in university is determined by teaching it as a means of intercultural communication in the field of professional activity. The modern credit-module system of higher education assumes that a significant part of the study time is allocated to independent work of students. The tendency to increase the amount of time devoted to independent mastering of educational and professional programmes, the concepts of continuous education and lifelong learning are oriented towards the student as an active subject of their own knowledge acquisition process. Self-management in education opens up the great potential of self-learning as one of the trends in lifelong education. This is especially relevant when it comes to learning foreign languages. Researchers of the problems of teaching foreign languages in higher education, highlighting modern trends in the development of education, emphasize the approach to perception of the educational levels obtained in the process of formal education not as a completed process, but as one of the stages in the continuity of education.

Key words: intercultural communication, education, lifelong education, self-learning.

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Introduction

A foreign language as a discipline has its own specificity, which is displayed by the fact that language skills need to be constantly practiced, since a foreign language lexicon quickly turns from an active vocabulary into a passive one, and over time is completely forgotten if there is no active and systematic communicative practice (in particular, this concerns four basic types of foreign language activity: listening, speaking, reading and writing). In view of the pointed trends in education, the paradigm of learning a foreign language evolved long ago from the goal of providing comprehensive knowledge purely during the formal stage of the learner's education. Now more and more often, the stage of education at higher education institutions is categorized as instructional and explanatory: its purpose is to sufficiently form a foreign language competence and teach students the algorithm of further, non-university language learning, that is, already within the framework of informal education.

Features of informal education in language learning

In order to specify the features of informal education in the sphere of learning foreign languages, it is necessary to highlight the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal education.

The analysis of scientific studies (*Taran, 2021; Tsviak, 2013*) shows that formal education is intended for a long-term program, or it may be a short-term course, after the completion

of which a graduate who successfully passes final exams, receives rights guaranteed by the Ukrainian legislature.

This is, first of all, the right to be engaged in paid professional work, the right to advance up the career ladder and obtain a higher position, the right to continue education in institutions of higher education with a higher degree of accreditation.

Formal education is received in educational institutions (taking into account specific educational goals) in an organized educational environment, which leads to the certification of the level of acquired competences (Taran, 2021). The concept of "certification" means the issuance of an official document confirming the assignment of an educational and qualification level recognized at the state level, and which is the foundation for further employment (certificate, diploma on completion of higher education, certificates confirming the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills, competences, etc.).

Non-formal education does not assume the awarding of state-recognized educational qualifications, but may be completed with the awarding of professional and/or the awarding of partial educational qualifications. It can be both face-to-face (trainings, workshops, seminars, etc.) and remote (distance courses, webinars, etc.). Modern non-formal education is carried out thanks to the existence of a wide range of distance learning platforms.

In recent years, along with such concepts as formal and non-formal education, the concept of informal education has been increasingly used.

Informal education is the acquisition of social and cultural experience that is not a part of the pedagogically organized process and does not have its features, it is a process of acquiring knowledge during life, which is not always conscious. This form of education is especially relevant in the aspect of improving the qualifications of specialists or obtaining postgraduate education.

In Ukraine, by the way, a project of the law "On adult education" (2020) is being discussed, which aims to create conditions for the development of adult education based on a comprehensive understanding of its social value and significance, to determine the priority directions of adult education, which would, in particular, ensure the formation in adults the key competences recommended by the European Union for lifelong learning. Among other important provisions regarding the priority areas of adult education, the areas of adult education are highlighted that ensure the formation of language competences in adults, the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, facts, feelings and thoughts in oral and written forms, conduct a constructive dialogue and interact with other people by means of native and foreign languages.

The distinguishing characteristics of informal education, compared to formal and non-formal types, are continuity, spontaneity, learning through interaction with the environment, the absence of any documentary confirmation of the results of such learning (Guisado, 2016). The last aspect is especially emphasized On the website of the European Commission on adult language education, it is stated that many skills, both personal and social, are acquired thanks to informal learning. Informal learning may sometimes occur involuntarily, unconsciously (in the process of traveling, communicating, interacting with media content in the target language, etc.). However, in domestic sources, the term "self-education" is used synonymously with the concept of "informal education", which still requires conscious purposeful activity, and self-control as opposed to the terms of involuntariness and spontaneity (Zhukevich, 2017: 140; Zakirova, 2014: 207). Therefore, informal education in relation to a foreign language will mean, in our understanding, the entire range of activities that fall under the content and scope of this concept.

Self-directed study of foreign languages by students of a technical university in an informal education environment against the background of European integration trends and the demands of the international labour market can be effective for their future career. In particular, knowledge of a foreign language will most likely help students work with international teams, carry out projects abroad and hold leadership positions in international companies. However, the formation of self-study skills, as researchers note, is still one of the biggest problems in modern universities (*Nhi, 2021: 2*). Problematic are the following issues: the amount of time that students actually spend on independent study of a foreign language on a permanent basis; 2) systematicity of self-study; 3) formation of techniques of self-educational activity (for example, the method of fixing new material, using technologies, performing special exercises for consolidation or communicative practice of new skills); 4) resources and special means (devices, programs) to make self-learning more effective. There is a lack of knowledge about the appropriate methods of post-university study of a foreign language (*Nhi, 2021: 4*).

That is, it is about the lack of formation of an effective language learning algorithm in the field of informal education. Not knowing where and how to start self-education is actually the most detrimental moment in this situation, as with age it becomes increasingly difficult for a person to force himself to engage in self-education, especially language learning, unless during the period of formal university studies a stable habit of self-study was formed, which would develop into the individual's need to expand their own knowledge and competence horizons and move along the intended individualized trajectory of language acquisition. Of course, the best incentive in this case is the need: if a person sees real and achievable prospects for professional realization thanks to knowledge of a foreign language, this will formally motivate them to increased self-learning activity. However, on the other hand, these are the good foreign language competences of the graduate that form better career prospects.

Tools for language learning organization

One of the approaches to self-learning foreign languages is the use of online resources. Lavrysh (2020) indicates that transformations of the information society encourage, and the use of digital technologies helps in the formation of autonomous learning skills, which contributes to the involvement of students in continuous education strategies with the further formation of linguistic as well as information and communication competences. The author claims that the involvement of students in autonomous educational activities through foreign language professional communication by means of digital technologies allows to increase indicators of the level of formation of professionally oriented communication skills in future specialists.

At present there are numerous digital resources that are popular around the world, for example, free online courses such as Duolingo or Memrise, which make it possible to learn a language at a time convenient for the student. Mobile applications (e.g. Babbel, Busuu, which contain a variety of exercises and tasks that allow language learners to focus on different aspects of the language, including grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) provide ample opportunities for self-study of a foreign language. University students also have many opportunities to learn foreign languages through the use of other Internet resources: listening to podcasts in a foreign language, reading articles, books (in particular, independent use of textbooks and manuals designed specifically for students of technical specialties), watching videos with subtitles and others. The following techniques will help overcome the difficulties of making the first steps in starting self-learning: awareness of a sufficiently serious reason to start and continue self-education; establishing formal self-control (compilation of an individual work plan for

self-study and tracking of the process of its implementation, clear goal setting, preparation of intermediate plans); developing one's own system of punishments and rewards for non-fulfillment / faithful implementation of the plan for independent study of a foreign language; communicating with people who have a successful experience of self-learning of a foreign language; realizing that foreign languages, especially English as a lingua franca, are the key to achievements in professional fields of knowledge, in particular, technical ones, as having singled out for yourself the sphere of professional interests, you can use a foreign language to keep abreast of the latest technical developments, and study of supplementary materials in a foreign language will simultaneously improve language competences.

Besides, the following steps can be recommended for organization of a self-directed study: looking for sources of the appropriate language level so that not to lose motivation (that is, if a student has the B1 level, and he/she reads complex specialized texts that require, in addition to high professional qualifications, also knowledge of a foreign language at the C2 level, then such work will definitely discourage and demotivate them); designing a set of topics beyond professional interests, which would make it possible to acquire knowledge of a foreign language that give pleasure and satisfy curiosity; learning psychological techniques of concentration and memorization; approaching self-learning comprehensively (i.e., forming a diverse and mutually complementary, harmonious complex of language learning resources and techniques); choosing the most convenient time and place for studying to minimize boredom, fatigue and distractions; trying to create a foreign-language environment around yourself as much as possible (looking for people who also study a foreign language or are native speakers of this language, being involved in social networks in a foreign language, listening to and watching videos in a foreign language, reading books, travelling, etc.).

Coaching technologies can be the optimal solution in developing one's own paradigm for learning a foreign language within the framework of informal education (*Harkusha and Shcheglova, 2022: 272*). An experienced coach will help you organize your independent work at the initial stages of self-study and give effective advice to achieve success. Also, a coach can come in handy if support or counselling are needed at further stages. Recent publications increasingly highlight the efficiency of coaching by teachers of higher education institutions. Coaching in the field of foreign language learning has already become a global trend (*Postykina, 2017; Akyildiz and Semerci, 2016; Harkusha and Shcheglova, 2022*).

As for adult education, Popova (2021) singles out peculiar poles of adult language education – from basic knowledge for those who are learning a specific language for the first time, to those who want to create high-quality texts in a foreign language, convey complex thoughts to native speakers in an optimal form and cover large amounts of information in a foreign language. And between these poles is the improvement of specific knowledge and skills necessary to achieve communicative goals in practical activities, for example, the formation of skills necessary for creating texts for everyday communication, improving listening skills, studying the terminology of specific fields of knowledge or features of texts, specific for professional communication.

4. Conclusions

Thus, informal learning of foreign languages, which is based on self-education, although studied less today than its counterparts, formal and non-formal learning, is no less an important stage of acquiring foreign language professional and cross-cultural competences.

It is important not to draw a line between the stage of formal university language learning and the informal stage, which ideally lasts a lifetime. In contrast to this, it is important

during university studies to form stable skills and motivational attitudes in students regarding self-education tools, in particular regarding learning a foreign language. Having transformed self-education into a need, teachers will receive greater effectiveness from their own teaching activities, and students of technical universities – a universal tool for achieving success at the stage of professional formation and further career growth.

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